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DPI VISTA Monthly

Turning Lemons into Lemonade

By Ruth Anne Landsverk

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Save the Dates!

April 15:
Quarterly Reports Due
Summer Plans Due

April 20:
Monthly VISTA Check-in



Some Action Teams have turned tragedy into triumph, failure into finesse, disaster into dessert. Okay, you get the picture. Don't let those low moments keep your team down. Here are a few examples of how actual teams used the unexpected to be better and to do more for children and families.

Challenge 1: Help, our principal is leaving!

This team floundered amid uncertainty and loss of direction for awhile, then used the opportunity to re-evaluate what they had done so far and find new direction for the team. They recruited new members; revisited the team mission, vision, and goals; and obtained administrative support for their vision and goals. They learned that broad-based membership can sustain and heal the team in a time of change.

Challenge 2: Help, our funds are gone!

When a small grant to increase parent involvement in the school dried up, this team turned to each other to think about how it would sustain itself. One of the Action Team members belonged to an organization that supported community services for students in need. This organization agreed to provide supplies, refreshments, and staff time to keep the Action Team running. Its work was sustained.

Challenge 3: Help, parents won't come!

This team wondered why Hmong parents wouldn't attend Action Team meetings or events, so they decided to ask. The team asked a translator to help convene a small group meeting of Hmong parents. Parents said they were unsure about the purpose and function of Action Team events and felt uncomfortable being in a large group of people whose language they didn't understand. To address their concerns, the Action Team held several special



meetings and events for Hmong families, including a festival that introduced all school families to Hmong food and culture. As a result, Hmong parents began to participate in all-school events, too.

Challenge 4: Help, our meetings have turned into gripe sessions!

One team learned that it's important to be open to feedback from members while keeping conversations constructive and focused on improvement. The team assigned one member the role of neutral facilitator. The fa-

cilitator was careful not to respond too quickly to negative feedback, realizing that people sometimes needed to "vent" before they're ready to move on to positive avenues. The facilitator thanked the member for sharing his/her feelings and asked team members collectively how it related to their mission and goals and what could have been done differently. Finally, the facilitator gave each member a chance to speak, ensuring that a variety of opinions were offered. Using this process, the team was able to move forward.

Challenge 5: Help, we have too much to do!

One team felt overwhelmed by all of the work associated with a Parent Academy designed to involve more parents in school decisionmaking and to help parents understand what children were learning in school. The team decided to break Parent Academy work into two tasks: (1) to plan logistics and (2) to determine topics and presenters. The team formed two subcommittees; each subcommittee was charged with handling one task and developing its own list of responsibilities, and deadlines. This proved an effective way to manage the well-attended Parent Academy.

How does your team handle hurdles?

E-mail the author at ruthanne.landsverk@dpi.wi.gov.

Let Us Smile Together

by Nichole Stachurski

Look around...
E Pluribus Unum, right?
We ALL suffer, struggle, and are challenged...
What does it matter?
I have nothing to share; I barely have enough for me.
You are like me. I am like you.
I want to smile.
When I smile- colors become brighter, burdens becomes lighter.
I have noticed YOU need to smile, too.
You deserve to smile.
I should do my part, I have been given so much-
The air in my lungs, hands to do, feet to go...
Let me wash YOUR feet.
I offer myself.



(L-R) Lizzy Lowrey and Stephanie Dorman



(L-R) Angela Rumsey, Ellen Carpenter, Dustin Young, Casey Burns, Becky Smith, Pen Bruskin, Sarah Glassman

Pictures from the National Issues Forum Training at the Goodman Center in Madison, WI, February 24–25.



Erica's Corner

by Erica Spurgeon

Q: "It's getting into the spring, and I still have no idea what to do after my VISTA term is up. Any advice?"

A: For the last year of our lives we have been giving our time to helping those in poverty. But as many of us near the end of our term we start to panic as to what we should do next. Well don't worry, there are thousands of AmeriCorps members and VISTAs who have all survived, and here is how:

1. Apply for another year. If you have only served one term, then you can apply to serve another one. You can apply to the same site or a different site. To find more information about this go to, www.americorps.gov/for_individuals/alumni/join.asp.
2. Go back to college. Remember, at the end of your term you get an educational award for \$4,725. Also, there are 91 colleges in the United States that will match that award. You can find them at www.americorps.gov/for_individuals/alumni/ed_award_match.asp.
3. Get a job. While we don't get paid the best, we do gain a lot of experience. Play this up on your resume to better your chances of getting a job after your VISTA term. Civic engagement, non-profit, fundraising, sustainability. These are all words you can use that employers want to see. After a year of service, VISTAs are also able to apply for government jobs with non-competitive eligibility status. On top of that, there are many VISTA alumni. Network with them. They can help you with your resume or even help you find a job. You can find more information about this at, www.americorps.gov/for_individuals/alumni/opportunities.asp.

Your life after VISTA will be one of a kind. You will have gained insightful experience, met a ton of great people, and most importantly, learned the value of a dollar. So remember, just because all good things have to come to an end, doesn't mean it's the end of all good things.

Recipe of the Month: Tortellini Soup

By Cara Slingerland

Ingredients:

32 oz. chicken or veggie broth
1/2 pkg. frozen spinach
2–14.5 oz. cans of diced tomatoes, Italian style
2 small or 1 large pkg. of fresh tortellini
3 garlic cloves
1 tbs. olive oil
Pepper, to taste

Optional:
parmesan cheese
fresh basil

1. Heat large saucepan over medium heat, then add olive oil once hot. Add garlic to oil and stir for about 15 seconds. Make sure not to burn the garlic!
2. Add the broth, cover the pot, and bring to a boil. Add tortellini to boiling water. When tortellini is almost *al dente*, add in the cans of tomatoes and stir.
3. Cook for 3 minutes or until simmering, then add frozen spinach and pepper. Stir until spinach defrosts and the soup is warm. Spoon soup into individual serving bowls and top with basil and parmesan cheese. *Manga!*

Cara says, "Any fresh or fresh-frozen tortellini can be used. I usually use Bertolli three-cheese or Roundy's frozen tortellini. It is way better than the dried stuff."



"Hey! That's a good idea!"

Ellen Carpenter, Becky Smith, and Dustin Young, VISTAs with the Madison Metropolitan School District, are working together to produce 14 district-wide parent engagement newsletters on topics such as parental involvement over the summer, back-to-school partnerships, cultural competence and appreciation, and women's history.

COMMUNICATING

Tracy Steffens, VISTA at Washington Elementary School in Oshkosh, helped organize a Math Night for families to come together at the school to engage in fun math games, and to learn how to apply these lessons and activities at home.

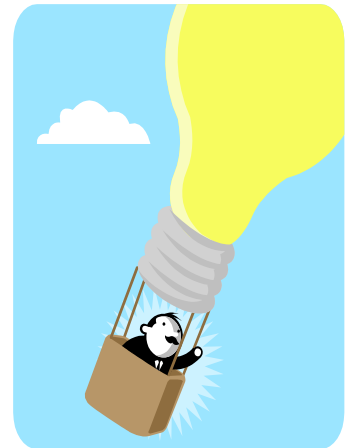
LEARNING AT HOME

Anna Morgen, VISTA at Pelican Elementary School in Rhinelander, is working with Nicolet College students and faculty to set up training dates so that families can receive computer training and resources for the "Computers from the Heart Program" in April.

COLLABORATING

Jim Handorf, VISTA at Madison Public Library, helped set up and promote the Volunteers in Tax Assistance program, which offers eight free sessions during tax season at the library where volunteers assist patrons and community members with filing their taxes efficiently and accurately.

FINANCIAL PLANNING



Josh Cowles and Sara Byrnes, VISTAs at Fond du Lac Public Library, are teaming up with other FDL-area VISTAs and community partners to put together a Summer Youth Leadership program where middle-school kids will participate in a week-long leadership seminar including leadership activities and service projects culminating in a hands-on painting project of the library's bookmobile.

EDUCATION

VISTAs in the News



Cara Slingerland—Parents Plus, Inc.—Milwaukee

Provided great visibility for the Joyce Epstein model of Action Team for Partnerships with her article, featured in *The Bayview Compass*. This article helps further VISTA efforts to spread the word about the positive effect Action Teams have on schools, particularly highlighting the role that Action Teams are playing in the restructuring of the Milwaukee Public School District.

<http://bayviewcompass.com/archives/3064>

Sylvia Sedrak—Wausau Early Childhood Program

Organized a basketball clinic that brought 65 preschoolers together with the Wausau West girls' basketball team to expose younger children to basketball and encourage them to stay active.

<http://www.wausaudailyherald.com/article/20100223/WDH0101/2230545/1581/WDH01>

This is My (University) Town

By Tracy Steffens

There are many positive perks to being a VISTA in a university town. Students, businesses, experts in fields of study, organizations and sport teams tend to gravitate around universities. It can be difficult to map all the resources of a university town and how to use those resources effectively. Here are some helpful hints and tips that I have learned from my VISTA position near UW Oshkosh so far.

University Students

Volunteer Base: Many students are required to perform community service hours for their classes or as a general education requirement to graduate. It is very helpful to look into service related majors, such as social work, education, nursing, human services and counseling to work with those departments to set up permanent volunteer or internship opportunities thru your organization.

Work Study Employees: Some university students qualify for work study dollars through federal financial aid. This is a great resource for finding cheap paid workers. At UW Oshkosh, we have a 50/50 relationship in which the university pays for half the work study's wages and our organization pays for the other half. It is important to note that sometimes students can transfer their federal loan dollars into work study dollars. Contact your local financial aid office for more details.

Special Talents: People go to college to learn a specific trade or to improve their talents and passions. Utilize the talents and knowledge of university students to the best of your ability. At our after school program, we have a physical education major who leads group games and an art education major who plans recycled art projects. If they are passionate about studying a topic, they will be passionate about sharing that talent and knowledge.

Student Organizations

Specialized Knowledge: All student organizations focus on a specific subject, such as archeology, foreign languages, science, etc. Many organizations can provide either educational materials or programming about their field of expertise.

Fundraising: If you are throwing an event that is line with a student organization, they can sometimes support you with monetary donations. For example, we are trying to purchase a kit that has tips and instructions on how to keep girls interested in math and science. We are thinking about asking the Women's and Gender Studies student organization to help us raise funds to buy this kit. In schools, many educational honors societies will collect Box Tops for Education and donate them to schools. Try and get on their list for donations!

University Staff

Mandatory Participation: This may seem a bit extreme, but it is ok to ask professors and departments to make working with your organization a mandatory part of a class. We have a partnership with the UW Oshkosh Math Education department that now makes it an integrated piece of their curriculum to come in, develop and play math games with our students. Since this is a part of the course curriculum, we have secured this partnership until the professor or requirements for the course changes.

Advertising

Campus Advertising: When you start thinking of all the ways to contact university students, the list is endless. School newspapers, residence halls, e-mail blasts, volunteer fairs, student organizations, college hang outs, and the list goes on and on. The key to advertising for university students and staff is to make sure that the advertisement matches the location. Flyers at a residence hall will look different and may contain different information than a quick e-mail blast.

University Facilities

Libraries: Many universities not only have a centralized library, but also libraries for each school of study. Using these specialized libraries is an excellent resource to find information focused on a topic or pieces of music, art other non-text items.

Special Facilities: Think about all the facilities that a university contains that you may be able to use as a resource on your asset map. Art departments have kilns, astronomy departments have planetariums, and biology departments have lab equipment, art exhibits, athletic events, musicals, guest speakers, etc. These items are consistently being replaced or can be used by your organization for field trips or educational opportunities.

Overall, university towns offer wonderful opportunities for lasting partnerships. Using staff, students, and facilities to your fullest advantage, and can help you fill in your asset maps with wonderful resources.



Colleen Douglass is serving with the Vaughn Public Library in Ashland, WI.

Tracy: Who is your favorite scientist and why?

Colleen: Melitta Bentz, she invented the coffee filter.

Tracy: What famous person do you think has the same handwriting as you? What makes you think this famous person and you would have the same handwriting?

Colleen: Chicken Little, I have very poor penmanship.

Tracy: What is your favorite bedtime story?

Colleen: I Love You Forever by Robert Munsch

Tracy: Is there any other city where you would enjoy being a VISTA?

Colleen: No, not at this point in my life.



Tracy: If you discovered a new planet (and rediscov-

VISTA to VISTA with Colleen Douglass and Tracy Steffens

ering Pluto doesn't count) what would you name it and why?

Colleen: Maum, (pronounced Mahum, but you say it like a baby lamb whining) because that is what my girls call me.

Tracy: *Do you think that teachers should be allowed to correct homework in red ink?*

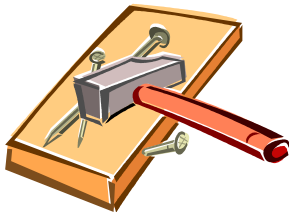
Colleen: No

Tracy: *Harry Potter series or Twilight Saga?*

Colleen: Harry Potter for sure.

Tracy: *What would your dream career be?*

Colleen: A job similar to this one; working with people, providing a service that would educate and empower them, as well as encourage them to pay it forward.



Tracy: *In every episode of Jeopardy, Alex Trebek tells a story about the contestants, what would be the story that Alex would tell about you?*

Colleen: Spending my spring break building a home in Mississippi, after hurricane Katrina. We were seven women working together, and four of us were single moms.

Ironically we had seven children and they were all girls.



Tracy Steffens is serving with the Washington Elementary School in Oshkosh, WI.

Colleen: *Where is your most favorite place on this earth?*

Tracy: I would have to say the Musée Toulouse-Lautrec in Albi, France. It is the largest collection of Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec's, my favorite artist, works from his masterpieces to his doodles on café napkins. It really shows that everything you touch in life has value.

Colleen: *What do you consider the most important event of your life so far?*

Tracy: I would have to say my birth.



Colleen: *Do you have any phobias?*

Tracy: My sister and I shared a room for a long time and she always terrorized me at night, which made me deathly afraid of the dark.

Colleen: *If your house was on fire and you could grab only 3 things before leaving, what would they be?*

Tracy: My favorite stuffed animal, a rabbit named Smokey, my French first edition of "Alice in Wonderland", and my knitting needles.

Colleen: *Do you believe in extraterrestrials or life on other planets?*

Tracy: As a devout follower of the History Channel's "The Universe", yes, I believe in life on other planets. My blog is called "Ice Fishing on Europa" (Europa is a moon of Jupiter) because scientists believe that this mostly ice covered planet has the highest probability of containing life in our galaxy.

Colleen: *What do you think the secret to a good life is?*

Tracy: Following all the advice that Nat King Cole gives in the song "Smile" when things go wrong in life.

Colleen: *If you could have 3 wishes granted, what would they be?*

Tracy: That I could make a career as a professional

knitter, take my family on an awesome vacation, and have a reliable source of teleportation.



Colleen: *If you HAD to change your name, what would you change it to?*

Tracy: My mother really wanted to name me Zuzu after the Zuzu Bailey in "It's a Wonderful Life".

Although it would put me at the end of any alphabetical by first name line, I would have enjoyed being Zuzu Steffens.

Colleen: *What is your goal in life? Do you think you will achieve it?*

Tracy: My goal in life is to have fun and enjoy the time I have been given... and so far I seem to be doing a good job of achieving it!

"Success is the sum of small efforts, repeated day in and day out."

Robert Collier

A VISTA Book List

Get Inspired! Get Motivated! Get Reading!

By Betsy Prueter



The last thing you have time for might be reading for fun, but given the hard work and commitment that you're all showing at your sites, the long hours, the busy nights and weekends, it might be time to step out of your world, and into one of these. These come highly recommended (ok, just from me but still) and will make you think, challenge your beliefs, tug at your heart, and hopefully, re-energize you in your service! And who knows, maybe potential for a VISTA book club exists?

THE MILAGRO BEANFIELD WAR

by John Nichols

In the predominantly Hispanic and Catholic small rural town of Milagro, a local man fights big business and New Mexico state political interests to save his bean field (his livelihood really) with the help of a VISTA member, placed in Milagro for his year of service. The message here is truly about the power of community (and how cool is it to read about a (albeit fictional) VISTA?!)

WHATEVER IT TAKES: GEOFFREY CANADA'S QUEST TO CHANGE HARLEM AND AMERICA

by Paul Tough

I seem to keep recommending this to people. And I also seem to keep giving away all my copies. But that's because it's worth a read. This story looks at creating change that could be replicated across the country to improve the lives of poor children. It's controversial, provocative, and timely. Geoffrey Canada's model is being highly praised by the Obama administration and cities across the country are being urged to adopt it.

STONES INTO SCHOOLS

by Greg Mortenson

Author of *Three Cups of Tea*, Greg Mortenson now continues the story of how the Central Asia Institute (CAI) built schools in northern Afghanistan. His now famous mantra of promoting peace through "books not bombs" is as inspiring as ever- and as poignant.

DREAMS FROM MY FATHER: A STORY OF RACE AND INHERITANCE

by Barack Obama

President Obama's story might be familiar to us now; but this autobiography describes the often painful, but ultimately inspiring journey to racial identity for our country's first black president.

OUTLIERS: THE STORY OF SUCCESS

by Malcolm Gladwell

This book will push some buttons as Gladwell asks,

"Why do some people succeed, living remarkably productive and impactful lives, while so many more never reach their potential?" His conclusions might ruffle some feathers, but his argument is fascinating...and at times very convincing!

MOUNTAINS BEYOND MOUNTAINS

by Tracy Kidder

Paul Farmer has one goal: to diagnose and cure infectious diseases and to bring tools of modern medicine to those who need them the most. And his ever present question- how are we to create lasting change if we don't engage those we are serving?

WARRIORS FOR THE POOR: THE STORY OF VISTA

by William H. Crook

Ever wonder what the beginning days of the VISTA program were like? What the first VISTAs were like? How the program was structured? The ideals and goals envisioned when VISTA launched? This book wasn't just an interesting historical read- it was a reminder for all of us to remember our roots and our anti-poverty mission. Thanks to Erica Spurgeon for the recommendation!

HALF THE SKY: TURNING OPPRESSION INTO OPPORTUNITY FOR WOMEN WORLDWIDE

by Nicholas Kristof

Initially recommended to me by Becky Smith, this powerful story was written by a New York Times columnist and his wife. They argue (effectively) for investing in the health and autonomy of women throughout the globe. Their appeals are moral (for instance, reminding us of rampant genocide of women worldwide) but they also point out that it is impossible for countries to climb out of poverty if only a fraction of women (9% in Pakistan, for example) participate in the labor force. Storytelling really drives this book- and it becomes very personal and very touching.

FOOD RULES: AN EATER'S MANUAL

by Michael Pollan

I don't think I can get enough of Michael Pollan. This book- a simple, sensible, and easy guide- contains rules for eating wisely, many drawn from a variety of ethnic or cultural traditions. It's less, shall we say, wordy than his previous books, and is perfect if all you have is a few spare moments (preferably while you're gnawing on some fresh fruit from an local organic farm).

April VISTA Events

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
				1	2	3
4	5 Play and Learn— Wausau 3:30p–5:00p Parent Cooking Classes— Wausau West High School 5:00p	6	7 Family Science Night @ Sennett Middle School— Madison 6:00p–8:00p	8 Spanish Language Club— Wausau 4:15p–5:00p	9	10 Young Athletes Program— Wausau 3:30p–4:30p
11	12 Play and Learn— Wausau 3:30p–5:00p Parent Cooking Classes— Wausau West High School 5:00p	13	14	15 Spanish Language Club— Wausau 4:15p–5:00p	16	17 Young Athletes Program— Wausau 3:30p–4:30p
18	19 Play and Learn— Wausau 3:30p–5:00p Parent Cooking Classes— Wausau West High School 5:00p PTO Meeting— Wausau 6:00p	20	21	22 Summer Resource Fair @ICS—Franklin 1:00p–7:00p Science Fair/Open House @ Maple Tree— Milwaukee Spanish Language Club— Wausau 4:15p–5:00p	23	24 Young Athletes Program— Wausau 3:30p–4:30p
25	26 Play and Learn— Wausau 3:30p–5:00p Parent Cooking Classes— Wausau West High School	27	28	29 Spooner Food and Wine Tasting, Silent Auction, and Chinese Raffle— Spooner 5:00p–8:00p Spanish Language Club— Wausau 4:15p–5:00p	30	

EVENT CONTACTS

- For more information on events in Wausau, contact Sylvia Sedrak at ssedrack@ausau.k12.wi.us
- For more information on events in Spooner, please contact Sara Hubin at sarahubin@hotmail.com
- For more information on events in Madison, please contact Ellen Carpenter at ecarpenter@madison.k12.wi.us.
- For more information on events at Maple Tree Elementary in Milwaukee, please contact Sarah Glassman at s.glassman@parentspluswi.org.
- For more information on events at the Indian Community School in Franklin, please contact Hannah Schulz at h.schulz@parentspluswi.org.

“Success is not measured by what you accomplish but by the opposition you have encountered, and the courage with which you have maintained the struggle against overwhelming odds.”

Orison Swett Marden

Grant Opportunities

Target: Early Childhood Reading Grants

Target Early Childhood Reading Grants promote a love of reading and encourage young children to read together with their families by supporting programs such as after-school reading events and weekend book clubs.

Maximum award: \$2,000.

Deadline: April 30, 2010

<http://sites.target.com/site/en/company/page.jsp?contentId=WCMPO4-031821>

Target: Art and Culture in Schools Grants

Target Arts and Culture in Schools Grants help schools and nonprofits bring arts and cultural experiences directly to K-12 students. Programs must have a curriculum component. Maximum award: \$2,000.

Deadline: April 30, 2010

<http://sites.target.com/site/en/company/page.jsp?contentId=WCMPO4-031819>

ING: Unsung Heroes

The ING Unsung Heroes awards program recognizes innovative and progressive thinking in education through monetary awards. Maximum award: \$25,000. Eligibility: full-time educators, teachers, principals, paraprofessionals, or classified staff members with effective projects that improve student learning at an accredited K-12 public or private school.

Deadline: April 30, 2010

www.ing.com/us/unsungheroes

NCSS: Christa McAuliffe Reach for the Stars Award

The National Council for the Social Studies Christa McAuliffe Reach for the Stars Award aims to help a social studies educator make his or her dream of innovative social studies a reality. Grants will be given to assist classroom teachers in: 1) developing and implementing imaginative, innovative, and illustrative social studies teaching strategies; and 2) supporting student implementation of innovative social studies, citizenship projects, field experiences, and community connections. Maximum award: \$2,500. Eligibility: full-time social studies teachers or social studies teacher educators currently engaged with K-12 students; NCSS membership required.

Deadline: May 1, 2010

www.socialstudies.org/awards/grants/mcauliffe/

NASSP/MetLife Foundation: Breakthrough Schools

The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) and the MetLife Foundation are calling for entries in the search for the nation's top "Breakthrough Schools." Applicants should be high-achieving middle or high schools, or schools that are making dramatic improvements in student achievement, whose best practices and outstanding results can inform other

schools as they further their own improvement efforts. Honorees will be chosen based on documented success in implementing strategies aligned with the three core areas of NASSP's Breaking Ranks II publication: collaborative leadership; personalization; and curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Maximum award: \$5,000. Eligibility: high-achieving middle and high schools with 40 percent or more students eligible for free and reduced priced meals.

Deadline: May 15, 2010

www.principals.org/AwardsandRecognition/BreakthroughSchools.aspx

NEA Foundation: Student Achievement Grants

NEA Foundation Student Achievement Grants aim to improve the academic achievement of students in U.S. public schools and public higher education institutions in any subject area(s). The proposed work should engage students in critical thinking and problem solv-



ing that deepen their knowledge of standards-based subject matter. The work should also improve students' habits of inquiry, self-directed learning, and critical reflection. Maximum award: \$5,000. Eligibility: K-12 public school teachers, education support professionals, and higher education faculty and staff at public colleges and universities.

Deadline: June 1, 2010

www.neafoundation.org/programs/StudentAchievementGuidelines.htm

